DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 344 697 PS 020 524

AUTHOR Morris, Beverley
TITLE The Child's Right To Play.
PUB DATE Sep 91
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Early Childhood Convention (5th, Dunedin, New Zealand, September 8-11, 1991).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Children; *Childrens Rights; *Creativity; Cultural Differences; Early Childhood Education; *Educational Needs; Elementary Education; Foreign Countries; *Play; Racial Bias; Safety; Sex Stereotypes
IDENTIFIERS Brazil; *Creative Play; Germany; Hong Kong; Japan; *New Zealand; Toy Lending Libraries; United States; War Toys

ABSTRACT

This paper argues that play is an important and fundamental educational process and that the child's right to play should be respected. The paper also comments on the 1990 Tokyo International Conference on the Child's Right to Play. Several issues related to children's play, both in and out of school, are discussed. The focus is on the state of children and play in New Zealand, but examples from several other countries are also provided. The issues discussed concern: (1) the space reserved for children's play; (2) the importance of playmates in the process of learning social skills; (3) the role of adults in children's play; (4) the child's right to play in safety; (5) dangers of crossing the street in traffic; (6) sexual abuse; (7) play as a therapeutic process for sick or hospitalized children; (8) toy-lending libraries; (9) concerns about war toys; (10) racism and sex stereotyping; (11) computer games; and (12) the importance of creative play. (GLR)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

THE CHILD'S RIGHT TO PLAY

5TH EARLY CHILDHOOD CONVENTION, Dunedin, SEPT. 1991

Beverley Morris

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

ED344697

"Play is an educational process of fundamental importance and the birthright of every child". The 1989 adoption by the General Assembly of the United Nations of the Convention on Children's Rights recognised this proposition in Article 31. Though New Zealand was one of some 90 countries to sign this convention, it has not yet ratified this document which means being required to report on the status and state of children within New Zealand.

The message from the 1990 Tokyo International Conference on the Child's Right to Play was that for any positive results to be won in this area, dedicated adults must line themselves against the right-wing faction of competition and the "user-pays" philosophy.

Here we were meeting in one of the most advanced technological societies - Japan - and we were being told by Professor Fukuda, a Japanese delegate, of the misuse of their children's time. Because the places in the universities leading to the best jobs are fiercely competed for, children are losing their playtime. 60% of the 10 year olds in the cities are going on at 4 o'clock to "prep" schools to cram for entry exams, Saturdays included.

The German delegates were complaining of an abundance of organised events which both take up and fragment children's free time. However the representatives from Third World countries reminded us that time for their children to play was severely limited by their need to find food and shelter for them to survive. Maslow's hierarchy of needs concerning survival and safety must be basic and yet the signs of playfulness break through at times. IPA President Robin Moore told us a story about a Brazilian child's diversion from begging by the sight of dust motes dancing in a sunbeam.

PS 020524

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Beverley Morris
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Brian Sutton-Smith mentioned that in some state schools in Philadelphia, recess, intervals and playtime have been eliminated on the grounds that these waste time at the taxpayers' expense.

SPACE

Inadequate environmental planning has taken playspace away from children and is manifest in the dehumanising scale of settlements, inappropriate housing forms and poor traffic management. The Japanese were driven to thinking about using space under elevated motorways for playgrounds but it was pointed out that poisonous fumes from the traffic could affect children's health.

In Nagoya the pre-conference tour party was taken for a picnic at a wilderness area in the middle of the city where there was a lake, with swamp area and much native foliage. The city planners wanted to develop squash courts and other facilities for adults but positively responded to a petition signed by IPA delegates from 20 countries to preserve this for the play and education of the neighbourhood children.

Hong Kong has squeezed space out of their crowded territory for a theme park based ironically on a Voyage to the Moon but at least the designers were thinking of something adventurous.

At Sendai, a new city north of Tokyo, we were taken through a large space put aside for a playground catering for disabled as well as "advantaged" children. It specialised in crafts made from the park plants.

COMPANIONS

While playmates are necessary for some games, they are crucial for learning social skills and for democratic order to be sustained. In the Western world with diminishing birth rates these peer groups are thinning out and the vertical structure of all age groups made possible by street meetings means that transmission of folklore is disappearing, its place taken by the television culture.

ADULTS

Adults who work alongside children at play must receive training to understand their role as "leisure-time pedagogues" as the Scandinavians call them. In the same way that adults develop children's speech by talking with them, they also have to play with children if their ability to play is to develop. The adults need to know when to stand back. Sutton-Smith spoke at the IPA Tokyo Conference of adult supervision without trespassing the child's right to play. Some play intervals in the United States were being controlled and converted into physical education lessons. (There was a worse alternative - by regarding this as the teachers' coffee break and getting the older children to "police" the playground.)

The child's right to play is being increasingly defined as the right to play organised games and here in New Zealand I have come across a "nursery" level of rugby for four year olds! The Hillary Commission has developed Kiwisports, concentrating on ballhandling skills to negate the emphasis on organised games. There is a positive trend towards co-operative games in early childhood centres in New Zealand and other parts of the world.

SAFETY

The child has the right to play in safety - New Zealand has made a good start by adopting a safety standard, incorporating a two-metre height in structures and surface restrictions under climbing sets. However Dr Tom Jambor, a delegate from USA,

reminds us that children are explorers of boundaries so we must not take away too many challenges. Safety limits have been judged by grown-ups and we must choose some leeway for those children who radiate confidence and wish to try to extend themselves. On the other hand we have to insist that those in charge of play areas take a strong view on the physical and mechanical maintenance of play equipment and grounds, for accidents will occur despite vigilance.

TRAFFIC

When I interviewed 100 mothers recently on their childrearing practices, I asked them about the child's going across the road to play. I was surprised at the furore this aroused in terms of the school-aged children. But then I remembered that the density of traffic and speed of cars have increased, that in Scandanavian countries children are not assumed to have traffic sense under twelve and that no longer can one trust children to play out "on the street".

For children to be allowed to play in neighbours' homes, quite formal arrangements are made by phone to check if it is convenient for the hosting mother. While it is realistic to worry about the social niceties, behind this concern is a fear of kidnapping and potential child abuse.

SEX ABUSE

There have been sufficient horrific cases in New Zealand to make parents war it is recognised that sexual molesters are usually known within the family circle, relatives and "friends". Hints that a child is subject to sexual abuse are apparent in the play history of that child and can be identified by a professional observer.

HOSPITAL PLAY

Sick and disabled children have a right to play as far as they are capable - in fact play is part of the therapeutic process. Specialised staff should assist the parents and nurses and there should be equipment and material available to promote play once the child has signified an interest.

TOY LIBRARIES

Because many of the toys that keep a sick child entertained are expensive, toy libraries that lend such playthings can be found around New Zealand. There are many children in the community whose parents cannot afford money out of a stretched budget but find the low lending fee for toys to satisfy a developmental stage. These need to be balanced by inexpensive play materials like sand and water.

WAR TOYS

The child has a right to expect a peaceful world to grow up in . PLAY for LIFE believes that we can model a world of peace by discouraging the use of military toys. While legislative measures on safety standards for toys has been passed in New Zealand, Associate Minister of Health, Katherine O'Reagan has declined to implement the voluntary code of practice recommended last year by the working party. Consumer and industry representatives were briefed to develop a voluntary code of practice on the advertising and packaging of toys that promote violence. The recommended code would have prevented the advertising of realistic-looking toy weapons. Toy weapons are one way in which we as a society legitimise and condone violence.

RACISM

Violent and ignorant people look for a scapegoat to unleash their power on and too often the victim is an ethnic minority. From the age of three children are beginning to form attitudes towards people of other races. Adults working with children need to acknowledge cultural differences in language and customs and immediately typify racist behaviour as unacceptable and discriminatory. They know that the child has a need for self-worth and how much depends on the recognition of the child's cultural background.

SEX-STEREOTYPING

Another barrier to a child's right to play is the designation of play on a gender-basis. Especially in the computer world boys may be given preference over girls, as they once dominated block and adventure play. With the training of early childhood teachers going more thoroughly into this area, there is a greater chance that the mismatch in play and education will be rectified.

COMPUTER-GAMES

While acknowledging the place of video games as a leisure-time activity for many children, we can question the value of limiting the physical exercise to one hand for too long and the mindless results of repeatedly blowing up another machine or, worse still, a human being. It is hardly an adventure or a lesson in how to be sociable.

CREATIVE PLAY

The child has a right to be creative in many ways and will do so within the natural environment. Sometimes the material for creativity has to be provided by the adults and will be varied from clay and wood to words and ideas.

With few play resources but with "free" creative tools such as body language, music, humour, recycled clothing and newspaper, highly effective results can be achieved, especially with a lead from playful adults.

I can't help but feel sad about schools where work is differentiated from play, where "to be taught" is differentiated from "to learn", where to copy is differentiated from being creative.

Children have a right to sympathetic adults - whether they be parents, teachers, policy-makers, or administrators. We can learn from the most industrialised countries in the world - "we can't screw off the children's heads and send them to school"! This was a comment by a Japanese delegate to the 1990 IPA Conference.

We must deal with the whole child and respect the child's right to play.